

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims and add new claims as set forth below:

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1. (Currently Amended) An offline-online points system, comprising:

a main server configured for providing a user with an interface to submit a code, ~~wherein the code is obtainable by the user from an item offline and is associated with N points, wherein each point, characterized as a purchase or attention incentive point, is redeemable and maintainable in an account for the user; and~~

a code server configured for maintaining a set of codes deemed to be valid codes and for comparing verifying, against the valid codes, that the code submitted by the user against the set of valid codes, wherein if based on the comparison the code is deemed valid the user is credited with a given number of points, wherein points earned by or credited to the user are accumulated, the accumulated points being redeemable for value, including an auctioned item for which the user submitted a winning bid is valid such that a balance in the account for the user is increased by a predetermined number of points if the code is valid.

2. (Currently Amended) The offline-online points system of claim 1, further comprising:

a user database configured with an account for holding the ~~account~~ accumulated points for the user, ~~wherein the balance of the account is M points prior to the user's submission of the code.~~

3. (Currently Amended) The offline-online points system of claim 2, wherein the balance of the account is M points prior to the user's submission of the code, wherein the given number is N, and wherein the code server is configured for updating the account balance to M+N points after the user submits the code and if the code is valid.

4. (Currently Amended) The offline-online points system of claim 2, wherein the ~~main server is configured for updating the account balance to M+N points after the user submits the code and if the code is valid~~ user earns points through auctioning items, the points being earned in lieu of cash payment for the auctioned items.

5. (Currently Amended) The offline-online points system of claim 2-1 wherein the code is C letters in length from an Alphabet of L letters.

6. (Previously Amended) The offline-online points system of claim 5, wherein C is 10.

7. (Previously Amended) The offline-online points system of claim 5, wherein L is 29.

8. (Previously Amended) The offline-online points system of claim 5, wherein L is 36.

9-23. Cancelled.

24. (Previously Amended) The offline-online points system of claim 1, wherein the points are maintained in the account in an encrypted form to prevent unauthorized interference with the user account.

25. (Currently Amended) The offline-online points system of claim 1, further comprising:

——— ~~means a computer program~~ for generating the code,; ~~and~~

——— ~~means for fixing the code being fixed~~ onto a medium such that the code is obtainable from the medium offline.

26. (Currently Amended) The offline-online points system of claim 25, wherein ~~the means for fixing the code onto the medium is a printer and~~ the medium is a bottle cap from which the code is readable to the user.

27-37. Cancelled.

38. (Currently Amended) A system for incentive points earning and redemption, comprising:

an auction web server with an auction database for auctioning items in an auction;

a store web server with a store database for maintaining information on items offered by a business;

a web server from which the auction web server and the store web server are accessible to a user for interacting therewith, including for participating in the auction of an item offered by the business, the web server, in turn, being accessible to the user from either or both of the auction web server and the store web server; and

a user database configured for maintaining a user accounts with, ~~each user account corresponding to a user for containing points earned by that the user,~~

wherein each point, characterized as a purchase or attention incentive point, is redeemable for value, including the winning bid price of the item being auctioned, and ~~wherein the number of points contained in the user account of a particular user relates to that user's interaction with the web server, web store server or auction server.~~

39. (Currently Amended) A system as in claim 38, further comprising:

a code server configured for maintaining a set of valid codes that are deemed valid and against which a code submitted by the ~~particular~~ user is verifiable,

wherein the code is obtainable by the user offline, and

wherein the ~~particular~~ user's interaction involves submission of the code for credit, the credit being equal to a given number of points to be added to the user's account if the code is verified to be valid in relation to which the user database is configured to receive into the user account a ~~predetermined number of points earned by that user.~~

40. (Currently Amended) A system as in claim 38, wherein the ~~particular~~ user's interaction involves registration, an indicia of attention to an ad, or a purchase, in relation to which the user database is configured to receive into the user account a predetermined number of points earned by that user.

41. (Currently Amended) A system as in claim 38, wherein the ~~particular~~ user's interaction involves entering a winning bid for the item being auctioned in relation to which the user database is configured to dispatch a predetermined number of points taken out of that user's account.

42. (Previously Added) A system as in claim 38, wherein the points are maintained in the user account in an encrypted form to prevent unauthorized interference with the user account.

43. (Currently Amended) An offline-online incentive points system, comprising:

one or more client computers;

a network; and

one or more servers accessible to the client computers via the network, at least one of the servers having an account database configured with accounts for users, each user account contains points earned by that user, wherein the points are redeemable for value, including an auctioned item for which the user submitted a winning bid via one of the client computers, and wherein the number of points contained in the account of a user is based on the number of points earned and redeemed by the user during interaction with the at least one server.

~~\_\_\_\_\_ a web server,~~

~~\_\_\_\_\_ a messaging server,~~

~~\_\_\_\_\_ a database server, wherein the web server interfaces with the network, the messaging server and the database server,~~

~~\_\_\_\_\_ a plurality of databases serviced by the database server, including an account database and one or more of an auction database, an incentive points database, a coupon database, a bidder database, a seller database, a merchandise database, and a bid database, wherein the account database is configured for maintaining user accounts, each user account corresponding to a user for containing points earned by that user, wherein each point, characterized as a purchase or attention incentive point, is redeemable, and wherein the number of points contained in the account of a particular user relates to that user's interaction with the at least one server.~~

44. (Currently Amended) A system as in claim 43, wherein the at least one server further has

a code server including a code database;

wherein ~~a~~ the code server is configured for maintaining a set of valid codes deemed to be valid and against which a code submitted by the ~~particular~~ user is verifiable,

wherein the code is obtainable by the user offline, and

wherein the ~~particular~~ user's interaction involves submission of the code for which a credit of a given number of points is added to the user's account if the code is found to be valid in relation to which the account database is configured to receive into the user account a predetermined number of points earned by that user.

45. (Currently Amended) A system as in claim 43, wherein the at least one server further ~~has~~ includes an authentication server configured for controlling user access by authenticating account information submitted by the user.

~~an authentication server configured for controlling user access by authenticating submitted user accounts information.~~

46. (Currently amended) A system as in claim ~~46~~43, wherein the ~~particular~~ user's interaction involves registration, an indicia of attention to an ad, or a purchase, in relation to which the account database is configured to receive into the user's account a predetermined number of points earned by that user.

47. (Currently Amended) A system as in claim 43, wherein the ~~particular~~ user's interaction involves entering a winning bid in relation to which the account database is configured to dispatch a predetermined number of points taken out of that user's account.

48. (Currently Amended) A system as in claim 43, wherein the network includes the Internet, wherein the at least one server includes a-and the web server and a messaging server are integrated in an Internet server to facilitate the user's interaction.

49. (Previously Added) A system as in claim 43, wherein the points are maintained in the account in an encrypted form to prevent unauthorized interference with the user account.

50. (Currently Amended) A method for offline-online handling of incentive points, comprising:  
obtaining a code offline from an item;

submitting the code online to a server that ~~has~~ maintains a set of valid codes deemed  
valid; and

at the server, comparing the code against the set of valid codes and, if the code is found to  
be valid, crediting a user that submitted the code with a given number of points; wherein the code  
is associated with N points earned by or credited to the user are accumulated, the points being  
redeemable for value including an auctioned item for which the user submitted a winning bid in an  
auction maintained by the server in a user account, wherein each point, characterized as a  
purchase or attention incentive point, is redeemable; and

~~verifying the submitted code against the valid codes to determine if it is valid, wherein if~~  
~~the submitted code is valid, a predetermined number of points are added to the user account.~~

51. (Currently Amended) A method as in claim 50, wherein the points are maintained in an  
account for the user account in an encrypted form to prevent unauthorized interference with the  
user account.

52. (Currently Amended) A method as in claim 50, wherein the points in the user account are  
~~redeemed-redeemable~~ for a gift or a discount ~~or through an auction.~~

53. (Previously Added) A method as in claim 52, wherein the auction is one of a standard  
auction, a Dutch auction, a progressive auction, a buy-or-bid auction, and a declining bid auction.

54. (Previously Added) A method as in claim 52, wherein the auction involves one or more of an  
automated closing, automated bidding, automated selling, and auction alert.

55. (Currently Amended) A method as in claim ~~50~~51, wherein points are added to the ~~user~~  
account for the user by authorizing credit points.

56. (Currently Amended) A method as in claim 50, wherein points accumulated for the user are  
~~added to~~ earned by or redeemed from the user ~~account~~ in response to a point-actionable event.

57. (Currently Amended) A method as in claim 56, wherein the point-actionable event for which points are ~~added~~earned is a purchase, an indicia of attention to an item on a web site, or registration, and wherein the point-actionable event for which points are redeemed is a winning auction bid.

58. (Previously added) A method as in claim 50 further comprising:

generating the code; and

fixing the code onto a medium such that the code is obtainable from the medium offline.

59. (Previously added) A method as in claim 58, wherein the code is fixed onto the medium by printing the code on a bottle cap from which the code is readable to the user.

60-70. Cancelled.

71. (New) An auction system, comprising:

a server;

clients;

Internet connections interfacing the clients to the server; and

a database server operatively connected via a first link to the server and operatively connected via a second link to a plurality of databases one of which being an account database containing accounts with points that are maintained in encrypted form, the points being redeemable for value including an auctioned item for which a winning bid is submitted;

wherein, when a bid is submitted to the server during an auction via one of the clients, points are temporarily removed from their respective account in the account database and set aside for the bid, the points being permanently removed from the account if the bid is successful, and

wherein points are permanently removed from their respective accounts in the database if their time has expired.